

Rural Connectivity Bottlenecks: The Achilles Heel of Digital India

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1. Introduction

The term *Governance* may be described as the process by which society steers itself. In this process the state, private enterprise and civil society interact with each other, articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. These interactions are now being significantly affected by the influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), constituting the phenomenon of E-Governance.

The beginning of the 21st century has been so much dominated by Information Technology (IT) that it has become a joke that in the dictionary of all words will now begin with the letter "E". Perhaps existence itself would now become e-existence. It is therefore, not surprising that everybody is talking about e-governance. If we try to define it we can say that E-Governance or Electronic Governance or Digital Governance is the effective use of the IT to improve the system of governance that is in place, and thus provide better services to the citizens.

In this regard our major nuanced focus would be on the most appraised and applauded initiative of government of India i.e. "*digital india programme/mission*".

2. Background:

India today is the world's largest digitally connected democracy, with 830 million Internet users. Digital transactions have grown manifold in recent years, making India the undisputed leader in real time digital payments.

The widespread adoption of smartphones and affordable mobile data plans has also contributed to the growth of India's digital economy. Mobile payments, digital banking, healthcare, tourism, and business are some of the sectors that have seen significant growth in recent years.

This tremendous change in the digital adoption of services can be attributed to the introduction of the "*Digital India programme*". The Digital India Mission, launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on July 1, 2015, aims to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The mission seeks to make government services accessible to citizens electronically by improving online infrastructure and enhancing internet connectivity.

The vision of Digital India is to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. It aims to utilize the power of technology to provide better governance and enhance the quality of services. It aims to promote digital literacy and bridge the digital divide

between urban and rural areas. The key focus areas of the vision include digital infrastructure, digital empowerment of citizens, and digital delivery of services.

Since its inception the mission proved to be very successful across India. Yet there are certain hindrances or bottlenecks which hinder the wider adoption of digital services across rural India thereby denying the availability, accessibility and affordability of government services to the remote areas.

3. Objectives of the study:

- I. To critically analyse the Digital India Mission.
- II. To assess the efficiency of the scheme.
- III. To acknowledge the bottlenecks to the scheme.
- IV. To identify ways for bridging the gaps in the scheme.

Methodology:

- o In this paper secondary sources were used from the government websites, other national newspapers like THE HINDU and few other online sources were also used.

Key elements of Digital India programme:



Opportunities Presented by Digital India:

Digital India has the potential to unlock numerous opportunities:

- **Economic Growth:** A thriving digital economy can create jobs, boost productivity, and contribute significantly to India's GDP. A report by McKinsey Global Institute estimates that digitization could contribute \$1 trillion to India's GDP by 2025.
- **Improved Service Delivery:** Digital platforms can streamline government services, making them more accessible, efficient, and transparent for citizens.
- **Enhanced Social Inclusion:** Digital tools can empower marginalized communities and bridge the social divide by facilitating access to education, healthcare, and financial services.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship:** A robust digital ecosystem fosters innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to the development of new products and services.
- **Empowerment and Participation:** Digital platforms can strengthen citizen engagement in governance processes and empower them to hold authorities accountable.

Digital India Mission-Bottlenecks:

Though the Mission proved to be a tremendous success yet there are certain challenges which are denying the accessibility of digital services to the rural population. They include:

Administrative constraints:

These are certain administrative hindrances involved in the implementation of the mission.

- *Disparities in implementation:* India has always had a India has always had a chronological divide. It has always been a multi-speed India and the disparity is not absent even in E Governance initiatives. NASSCOM's analysis of E-Governance implementation undertaken in 10 key States has revealed that the southern States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and TamilNadu are leading in terms of implementing projects at different citizen - Government tinterface points. Others like Kerela, Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP, West Bengal and Rajasthan, are catching up fast while all other states are yet to start the process.
- *Rigidity of Bureaucracy:* Perhaps the most important administrative constraint for computerization and use of IT in governance, is the mindset of the government servants as :

They are accustomed to work only in the manual mode. b. They are still dominated by that colonial mentality, which is the biggest hurdle in realizing the goal of good/smart governance. For meaningful e-Governance, Government process re-engineering is a prerequisite and necessity.

- *Infrastructure bottlenecks:* E- Governance, for its successful implementation, needs essential infrastructure, which not only includes ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools like Connectivity, Internet, and Public Access Infrastructure but also includes uninterrupted power supply. Unfortunately that is not available in our country. Though during the last few decades' government has spent a huge amount in the name of developing adequate communication network in the villages but reality is far away from it.
- *Top down Model of Indian Bureaucracy:* Overall E- governance system planning and design in India is limited by a top driven policy mindset. It is to note that bottom-up, demand-driven development objectives are usually more preferable than top-down, supply driven objectives.

Social Constraints:

In realizing the goal of good governance by using information technology there are some Social constraints challenging the implementation of the scheme.

- *Digital Divide:* Digital divide is defined as the disparity between individuals with and those without access to a computer and the Internet. The divide is applicable to all population sectors encompassing both adults and children, but the focus of much attention, has been on segments of the population seen as un-served - low income, rural and women.
- *Threat from private entrepreneur-ship model:* There is another threat that the profit motive of an exclusively private entrepreneur-ship model can deepen this divide.
- *Gender Divide:* Ability to derive equal benefits from the process of governance has been a big challenge for the Indian women. Due to patriarchal character of the society this process has been undoubtedly male centric, one of the major factors responsible for creating gender based divide in the society.

Many factors prevent women from having a share in the pie, called E governance. According to UN statistics, by regions, women are only 22 percent of all Internet users in Asia. While poverty is a gender-neutral attribute affecting the access of men and women equally to the gains from technology, these gender-specific antecedents impede women's access of IT. According to the census of 2011, the literary rate of Indian women is only 65.46% as compared to that of men 82.14%. This data clearly demonstrates the lack of access for women to relevant education /technical education and thus marginalization of women in technical education.

- *The patriarchal character of the society:* The patriarchal character of the society also acts as a constraint for women in using ICT services to take advantages of E-governance. The public kiosks, Internet café are mostly run / used by men and in many social and cultural groups women are not allowed to visit these places alone. Owing to these factors E-governance in India is currently a male perspective that is evident from this data that in India, the proportion of male and female Internet user is 53:47, while in USA it is 94:96.

- *Absence of women from decision-making structures:* Unfortunately few women are producers of information technology, whether as Internet content providers, programmers, designers, inventors, or fixers of computers. In addition, women are also conspicuously absent from decision-making structures in information technology in our country.

Other Constraints:

- *Lack of skilled man power:* Absence of efficient staff and crew to overlook the implementation of various flagship programmes launched under the mission remains to be a huge hindrance.
- *problems in technology adaptation:* As small and marginal households and the micro and medium scale industry are facing acute challenges in the adaptation of new technology. Hence it hinders the accessibility of fruits to the marginalised sections of India.
- *Cyber security concerns:* Cyber threats and Cyber bullying are certain new age hindrances to the effective implementation of the programme.
- *Lack of high speed network:* Lack of equitable access to the high speed network in India, majority of the rural population are disconnected from the mainland activities. India is at a relatively disadvantaged position as compared to other developing nations.

Conclusion:

- *Bridging the Digital Divide:* Implement initiatives like the PM WANI scheme to establish public Wi-Fi networks, targeting 2 million hotspots by 2024.
- Invest in 5G infrastructure, aiming for 40% population coverage by 2025.
- *Enhancing Digital Literacy:* Scale up the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA) to reach its target of training 60 million rural households.
- Integrate digital literacy programs in Strengthening Cybersecurity.
- Implement the *National Cyber Security Strategy*, targeting a 50% reduction in cybercrime incidents by 2026 through strong legislation and robust privacy mechanisms.
- Aiming to increase the digitally literate population from 34% to 50% by 2025.

These are some of the ways to enhance the implementation of the scheme so that remote regions of our nation can be integrated into the mainstream governance thereby fruits of the governance can be equitably distributed.

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